

# *Sketch*

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## Cement to Wood

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## Cement to Wood

Bailie Bonnichsen

When I walk through the doors, everything else seems to disappear. Things don't go away completely, but nothing else matters anymore. The bright lights make everything clearer, but all I care about is what happens inside the lines. Although it's one of the noisiest places I've ever experienced, the only things I can hear are the squeaks of my teammates' and my shoes. The basketball court is where I could be for hours and still want to stay longer.

I've been playing basketball for as long as I can remember. When we lived in our old house we had a basketball hoop on the roof of my mom's shop, but when I was six we got our new house and my dad put up an adjustable hoop so I could reach it better. I loved it when my dad, brother, and I would go out and play basketball until it was too dark to even play with the driveway lights. My dad used to put me on his shoulders so I could dunk it on the little hoop, then my brother, Beau, would show me how he could dunk it without Dad's help. Being three and a half years older than me, he was a lot bigger and stronger, so I looked up to him...but I never let him know that. My brother and I didn't get to do a lot of things together when he got older, so when he would willingly play basketball with me, it meant a lot.

When I got a little older I would play with Beau and all his friends. I always thought I was a badass and would try to show off in front of the older guys—I don't think it ever worked. I would always try to dribble through my legs, and the ball would end up bouncing into the grass. Or I would shoot a long shot and pray that I would make it, although I could barely make a shot that was three feet from the basket. During the summers there would be some pretty intense games of basketball—normally between my brother, his friends, and me. When I say intense, I mean I would never get the ball and if I did, it would just get stolen from me. I would usually get hurt, but I would have to act like I was fine because I didn't want to be a sissy in front of Beau and his friends. Sometimes I would get a couple of my friends to come play, but the guys didn't really like playing with us. I liked playing a lot better when it was just my brother and me. When his friends weren't around, Beau loved playing with me. He enjoyed having someone to beat up on and always having the satisfaction of a win. I didn't mind though. Spending time with my brother was enough to make me happy, no matter what the outcome of the game was. My dad realized that we loved the game so much, he bought us some spray paint and told us to make the basketball court lines on the driveway. Once Beau and I got the lines drawn, the games

got very competitive. Growing up I was always told not to cry and that it didn't make the pain go away, so that's what I believed. I got scrape after scrape and countless scars but never quit playing.

When I got to 4th grade, my court changed from cement to wood. I could finally play basketball for the school. I couldn't wait to play with teammates that were my age and actually my size. I can't remember how good my team or I were, but watching the younger kids play now, I'm sure we were pretty terrible.

In junior high we got a little better. We only lost three games, but the competition wasn't too difficult. At our last game of my eighth grade year, the high school coach, Mr. Sanderson, came to talk to us about coming to varsity practices for the rest of the season. At the age of 14, I was pretty tall for my age, so I played the position of a post all through elementary and junior high. I was a little intimidated because the high school posts were a lot taller than me. Little did I know, I would be playing point guard for the rest of my basketball career. Still, I wondered, "Would the older girls like me? Would I be good enough to practice with seniors? Will anyone else go?" All these thoughts ran through my head, but I ended up not having a choice about going to the high school practice. My dad told me that I was going, and that was that.

Up to this point I liked basketball. From the end of eighth grade to the beginning of freshman year, I realized that basketball was more than just a game to me. Being on the court gave me a feeling that nothing else had before. Every time I walked into the gym my heart seemed to beat faster and my mood would improve drastically—no matter how bad of day I was having.

Being on the wooden floor makes every problem, every homework assignment, every ache or pain go away. Basketball practice gives me just enough motivation to get me through any class, any day. Practices aren't always the easiest thing to get through. Sometimes people are in a bad mood, and we run a lot, which makes them even more irritable. For me it doesn't matter what kind of mood I'm in, I'm just happy to be playing ball. My teammates just add to my excitement for the game. I've been playing with the same group of girls since junior high, and we have only become closer friends throughout the process. I'm not sure what it is about being in a gym or on a basketball court, but when I'm playing I'm so into the game I don't realize the crowd screaming or remember what has happened earlier in the day.

It starts in the locker room. Everyone is gossiping and trying to get their hair just right. I put the #34 jersey over my head and admire the white uniforms edged with black and gold. Coach will then come in and talk to

us about the game we are about to play. He gives us our instructions on what defense to start in and who the five starters are. By now, my nails are completely chewed off and my heart's starting to race. We start our warm-up routine with some upbeat music like "Bring 'Em Out" or our generally late pep band playing our school's fight song. The starters' names get read into the microphone then the game begins. My adrenaline continues to increase and once the tip-off whistle blows, I don't think of anything else. Once my teammate tips the ball into my hands, it's impossible. It's 100% running up and down the court for a full thirty-two minutes or sometimes even longer. Everything is silent except the few noises that I hear—shoes squeaking, teammates calling to get the open shot, and Coach Sanderson hoarsely yelling out defenses. My head is clear of everything but basketball. No drama, no boys, no stupid fights. Just basketball. It's making the perfect pass and taking the open shot. Coming up with the loose ball and getting it to a teammate down the floor for a layup. It's those final minutes, final seconds of a close game.

Once the final horn sounds, it's back to normal. I can hear the crowd screaming when we win, or talking quietly when we lose as they walk slowly out the door. I'm still not thinking about the school day before, but the basketball game that happened just a few seconds ago. "What did I do wrong? What could I have done better? How many assists did I have?" Walking back into the locker room is either depressing or inspiring. I love to hear the other girls congratulate each other and talk about our new record, but I'm a little different. In the locker room I'm normally still thinking about the game. I think about the game until I fall asleep. I even replayed an entire game in my dream once.

Basketball is more than just a game to me. It's something I can run away to whether it's on the worn out cement court in my driveway or the freshly waxed hard wood that I played on throughout high school. I've run countless sprints and drills, heard too many lectures from parents and coaches, and missed out on plenty of other things to do. I would get countless floor burns and bruises, but there was no other way I would have wanted it. I still have a few of the scars today, and though I am no longer playing the game on a high school team, my love for the game has still not changed.

Since I've started my junior year in college, I have the privilege to play on a cement court once again. I babysit two kids who remind me exactly of my brother and me years ago. Ally just turned seven and Caleb is eleven—almost the same age difference as Beau and me.

When I first walked out to their backyard, I noticed the spray painted

lines carefully stenciled on the cement slab. It instantly brought a smile to my face as I watched Ally attempt to shoot at the basket that was far too high for her small stature. Caleb and I struggled to get the hoop brought down to a height that Ally could shoot at, and I thought about how it felt for my brother to always do that for me. I smiled as I joined in on their game and silently thought back to how it used to be.

Although I enjoy playing on the cement, I know my game will be brought back to the hard wood floor before I know it. I got my Coaching Authorization last summer and have been working with my coach's new team for the past two summers. I know when I walk into the gym during my first coaching job, I'll be taken back to each spot on the floor where I came up with a loose ball and passed it to my open teammate or where I made the winning shot. I'll be taken back when I hear the crowd screaming after a big game. Everything will seem to disappear. I'll be there for hours and want to stay longer.

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